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The XIVth Congress of the Union Internationale des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques (UISPP) was held at the University of Leuven in Belgium in September 2001. This BAR International Series publication comprises 29 papers and 4 posters given at the 6th section (Upper Paleolithic) of the UISPP Congress, published in 2004 in French and in English. Despite the title of the section (Upper Paleolithic), the papers cover a wide range of topics from the end of the Middle Paleolithic to the very end of the Upper Paleolithic. The geographic scope of this publication is also extensive, and, in fact, confusing, as it incorporates the analyses conducted on archaeological collections from Western (France, Italy, Belgium, Spain) and Central Europe (Romania, Hungary, Montenegro, Slovakia, Poland), Eurasia (Russia, Uzbekistan, Siberia, Mongolia), and the Near East (Israel). The majority of the papers are best described as site reports of recent excavations, new analyses of previously excavated collections, or regional syntheses using both new and existing datasets. It is also difficult to pinpoint the main theoretical perspective of this wide array of publications. However, they tend to share a common interest in a chrono-cultural understanding of the different regional techno-complexes defining the Upper Paleolithic. A shared techno-economic approach to lithic assemblages may also give some unity to these studies, which thus stand as a good illustration of the different research traditions in Europe.

Although the announced theme of the session is the Upper Paleolithic, a total of eight papers and posters tackle some aspects of the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transition. Palma di Cesnola offers a broad synthesis of the relationship between the Aurignacian and Uluzzian industries in Italy in order to propose a general chronological model of population movements during the transitional period. Based on a review of published lithic assemblages, their stratigraphic successions at several key-sites, and recent radiocarbon dates, the author emphasizes the lack of contact between both industries across Italy. The climatic instability of the Late Pleistocene is also put forward as a crucial factor explaining the gradual migration of Aurignacian groups to southern Italy, previously occupied by Uluzzian groups only. In a similar fashion, Domenech Faus proposes a quick overview of the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transition in southern Spain as a prelude to the analysis of the stratigraphic sequence of the site of La Cova Beneito

(Spain). According to the author, this site is currently the only site documenting successive Mousterian-Aurignacian occupations with clear sedimentary gaps in southern Spain. This would support the hypothesis of the arrival of Aurignacian populations after the final Mousterian (Layer D1 dated to 30,160±680 bp). The core of the argumentation is based on a new interpretation of the site stratigraphy based on test pits conducted in 1999. As a result, the Aurignacian layer (Layer C4), previously identified during the 1980–1990 excavations, was not identified in the new excavation, further supporting the absence of transitional industries in southern Spain. New radiocarbon dates and a more detailed analysis of the sequence will be required to further support these claims and to fully explain the contradictory radiocarbon dates published here.

Chirica, Borzic, and Valeanu conducted the analysis of existing lithic collections documenting the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transition in Romania. Also pending further analyses, the authors argue that the local Mousterian industries coexisted between 50,000 and 40,000 years bp with the newly arrived Aurignacian groups sporadically located in the same regions. As stressed by the authors, the lack of consensus in the very definition of these industries renders any synthesis premature at this point. In general, the publications concerning the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transition support the current hypothesis that this transition should be best studied at a regional scale as we are only starting to grasp its complexity and variability at a regional scale.

Four articles focus on the analysis of the Aurignacian and Gravettian lithic assemblages from the site of Abri Pataud (France) excavated by H.L. Movius (1958–1964). These studies target both lithic raw material usage patterns and intrasite spatial organization. The raw material studies rely upon the extensive number of lithic raw material surveys conducted in Western France over the last 50 years. The authors thus were able to conduct a detailed analysis of the distribution of specific raw material categories in different typological and technological classes. They demonstrate that the differences between the Aurignacian and Gravettian assemblages are best conceived as a gradual and subtle shift in raw material selection for certain tools and blank types. As demonstrated by other studies in the same region, local lithic raw materials were the main lithic resources used during most of the Upper Paleolithic as high-quality and

abundant siliceous rocks were readily available along most riverbeds across the entire region. The differences in lithic raw material selection between techno-complexes, or even assemblages, can thus only be observed through the distribution of more discrete non-local raw material categories. Overall, their analysis suggests that the increased use of non-local raw materials, particularly the selection of chert from the region of Bergerac, in the Gravettian assemblages of Abri Pataud may reflect new mobility patterns that permitted the collection of high-quality raw materials located further away from the camp. This hypothesis is further supported by a correlation between the frequency of Bergerac chert in specific blank categories (prismatic blade) in the assemblages as previously observed by other researchers in this region (Demars 1994; Steenhuyse 2007). The ability of Gravettian hunter-gatherers to access non-local raw materials at higher frequency than the Aurignacian groups may therefore be the result of new mobility patterns, population increase, or the emergence of trade networks.

Besides the papers dedicated to recent excavations and the analysis of archaeological collections, a smaller number of papers focus on testing specific hypotheses regarding site distribution patterns (Demars) and Neandertal extinction (Stewart). Demars builds upon his previous analyses of site regional distribution patterns across the Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic in the Aquitaine region (Demars 1996) and in France (Demars 1998). The author specifically targets two variables (altitude of the site and ratio of open-air sites to rockshelter sites) using a large database compiling data from published sources. Expectedly, the average altitude of the sites appears to be strongly correlated with the overall climatic variations of the Late Pleistocene where warmer trends allowed Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic hunter-gatherers to move up to higher grounds, while colder periods clearly limited the use of sites at high altitudes. The frequencies of open-air sites further confirm this trend, strongly suggesting that climatic variations had a direct impact on mobility and landscape use patterns during the Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic in western France. Although these results may be expected, Demars' analyses contribute to constructing a strong foundation for the formulation of new hypotheses targeting more specific aspects of Upper Paleolithic mobility patterns and economic behaviors in general.

Stewart's article considers Neandertals, and their apparent extinction, within a broader ecological analysis of large mammal extinctions during the Late Pleistocene. He thus challenges the widely accepted notion that later hominid survival was less affected by environmental conditions and climate change. According to Stewart, Neandertals should be best conceived as a large and robust member of our genus typically adapted to the general conditions of Pleistocene Europe. However, their overall robusticity does not necessarily reflect an adaptation to Ice Age conditions. On the contrary, Stewart argues that Neandertals, as well as other large mammal species, were adapted to the Western fringes of the Eurasian continent which was characterized by a mosaic of rich biotopes during the Late Pleistocene.

The subsequent cold and unstable conditions of the later Pleistocene dramatically impacted these biotopes creating less diversified and less rich environments. The specialized nature of Neandertal behavioral and physical adaptive strategies apparently did not allow them to successfully cope with harsher, colder conditions. Stewart further argues that the extinction of the last Neandertal populations mirrors the extinction of other large-bodied mammal species whose survival depended on rich environments. The global trend toward small-bodied and less robust species, as is documented for many other mammal species, also could explain their replacement by anatomically modern humans. The extinction of Neandertals would thus be yet another example of environmental pressures selecting out specialized robust species over more flexible and gracile ones. Stewart develops a convincing case widely supported by ecological models and large paleontological dataset.

Following Stewart's analysis, Utrilla et al. challenges the now classic Ebro Frontier hypothesis, which states that the Aurignacian groups did not push further south of the river Ebro in northern Spain. This divided the Iberian peninsula into a southern Mousterian/Neandertal occupied region and a northern Aurignacian/modern humans dominated region. Further climatic and ecological factors have been put forward to support this hypothesis over the years. The review of available radiocarbon dates and new observations tends here to support Zilhão's (1997) conclusions that several frontiers, in fact, can be identified during the transitional period. According to the authors, Neandertals occupied the region south and north of the Ebro River, selecting marginal regions where Aurignacian groups were not present at that time. They also point out that in order to further document the relationship between Mousterian and Aurignacian groups in the Iberian Peninsula, the analysis of new datasets must be conducted.

This set of papers provides a good sample of recent research and field projects across a vast region. As a result, the volume appears disjointed. The poor translation (in French and in English) of some papers makes reading them quite difficult and in fact frustrating. It seems that the editorial process was virtually absent, as several articles appear to be not much more than conference scripts, littered with grammatical mistakes and spelling errors, rather than fully edited academic publications. For that reason, the quality of both the text and the illustrations is highly variable from one article to the next. Despite the lack of thorough editing and accurate translations, the papers succeed in demonstrating the regional complexity of what is currently defined as the Upper Paleolithic in Eurasia, through somewhat detailed site reports and collection studies. While the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transition has been a major focus in Paleolithic studies for several decades, new analyses of the later parts of the Upper Paleolithic, such as those published from this conference, may also contribute to a better understanding of Paleolithic hunting-gathering lifeways as a whole and to identifying the sources of lithic variability, as well as isolating migratory routes and population movements across Eurasia.

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